Partial Magic in the *Quixote*

It is plausible that these observations may have been set forth at some time and, perhaps, many times; a discussion of their novelty interests me less than one of their possible truth.

Compared with other classic books (the *Iliad*, the *Aenied*, the *Pharsalia*, Dante's *Commedia*, Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies), the *Quixote* is a realistic work; its realism, however, differs essentially from that practiced by the nineteenth century. Joseph Conrad could write that he excluded the supernatural from his work because to include it would seem a denial that the everyday was marvelous; I do not know if Miguel de Cervantes shared that intuition, but I do know that the form of the *Quixote* made him counterpose a real prosaic world to an imaginary poetic world. Conrad and Henry James wrote novels of reality because they judged reality to be poetic; for Cervantes the real and the poetic were antinomies. To the vast and vague geographies of the *Amadis*, he opposes the dusty roads and sordid wayside inns of Castille; imagine a novelist of our time centering attention for purposes of parody on some filling stations. Cervantes has created for us the poetry of seventeenth-century Spain, but neither that century nor that Spain were poetic for him; men like Unamuno or Azorín or Antonio Machado, who were deeply moved by any evocation of La Mancha, would have been incomprehensible to him. The plan of his book precluded the marvelous; the latter, however, had to figure in the novel, at least indirectly, just as crimes and a mystery in a parody of a detective story. Cervantes could not resort to talismans or enchantments, but he insinuated the supernatural in a subtle — and therefore more effective — manner. In his intimate being, Cervantes loved the supernatural. Paul Groussac observed in 1924: "With a deleble coloring of Latin and Italian, Cervantes' literary production derived mostly from the pastoral novel and the novel of chivalry, soothing fables of captivity." The *Quixote* is less an antidote for those fictions than it is a secret, nostalgic farewell.

Every novel is an ideal plane inserted into the realm of reality; Cervantes takes pleasure in confusing the objective and the subjective, the world of the reader and the world of the book. In those chapters which argue whether the barber's basin is a helmet and the donkey's packsaddle a steed's fancy regalia, the problem is dealt with explicitly; other passages, as I have noted, insinuate this. In the sixth chapter of the first part, the priest and the barber inspect Don Quixote's library; astoundingly, one of the books examined is Cervantes'

own *Galatea* and it turns out that the barber is a friend of the author and does not admire him very much, and says that he is more versed in misfortunes than in verses and that the book possesses some inventiveness, proposes a few ideas and concludes nothing. The barber, a dream or the form of a dream of Cervantes, passes judgment on Cervantes. . . It is also surprising to learn, at the beginning of the ninth chapter, that the entire novel has been translated from the Arabic and that Cervantes acquired the manuscript in the marketplace of Toledo and had it translated by a *morisco* whom he lodged in his house for more than a month and a half while the job was being finished. We think of Carlyle, who pretended that the *Sartor Resartus* was the fragmentary version of a work published in Germany by Doctor Diogenes Teufelsdroeckh; we think of the Spanish rabbi Moses of Leon, who composed the *Zohar* or *Book of Splendor* and divulged it as the work of a Palestinian rabbi of the second century.

This play of strange ambiguities culminates in the second part; the protagonists have read the first part, the protagonists of the *Quixote* are, at the same time, readers of the *Quixote.* Here it is inevitable to recall the case of Shakespeare, who includes on the stage of *Hamlet* another stage where a tragedy more or less like that of *Hamlet* is presented; the imperfect correspondence of the principal and secondary works lessens the efficacy of this inclusion. An artifice analogous to Cervantes', and even more astounding, figures in the *Ramayana,* the poem of Valmiki, which narrates the deeds of Rama and his war with the demons. In the last book, the sons of Rama, who do not know who their father is, seek shelter in a forest, where an ascetic teaches them to read. This teacher is, strangely enough, Valmiki; the book they study, the *Ramayana.* Rama orders a sacrifice of horses; Valmiki and his pupils attend this feast. The latter, accompanied by their lute, sing the *Ramayana.* Rama hears his own story, recognizes his own sons and then rewards the poet. . . Something similar is created by accident in the *Thousand and One Nights.* This collection of fantastic tales duplicates and reduplicates to the point of vertigo the ramifications of a central story in later and subordinate stories, but does not attempt to gradate its realities, and the effect (which should have been profound) is superficial, like a Persian carpet. The opening story of the series is well known: the terrible pledge of the king who every night marries a virgin who is then decapitated at dawn, and the resolution of Scheherazade, who distracts the king with her fables until a thousand and one nights have gone by and she shows him their son. The necessity of completing a thousand and one sections obliged the copyists of the work to make all manner of interpolations. None is more perturbing than that of the six hundred and second night, magical among all the nights. On that night, the king hears from the queen his own story. He hears the beginning of the story, which comprises all the others and also —

monstrously — itself. Does the reader clearly grasp the vast possibility of this interpolation, the curious danger? That the queen may persist and the motionless king hear forever the truncated story of the *Thousand and One Nights,* now infinite and circular. . . The inventions of philosophy are no less fantastic than those of art: Josiah Royce, in the first volume of his work *The World and the Individual* (1899), has formulated the following: “Let us imagine that a portion of the soil of England has been levelled off perfectly and that on it a cartographer traces a map of England. The job is perfect; there is no detail of the soil of England, no matter how minute, that is not registered on the map; everything has there its correspondence. This map, in such a case, should contain a map of the map, which should contain a map of the map of the map, and so on to infinity.”

Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights?* Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet?* I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1833, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all men write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written.

Translated by J. E. I

Coleridge’s Dream

The lyric fragment “Kubla Khan” (fifty-odd rhymed and irregular lines of exquisite prosody) was dreamed by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge on a summer day in 1797. Coleridge writes that he had retired to a farm near Exmoor; an indisposition obliged him to take a sedative; sleep overcame him a few moments after reading a passage in *Purchas* that describes the construction of a palace by Kublai Khan, the emperor whose fame in the West was the work of Marco Polo. In Coleridge’s dream, the text he had coincidentally read sprouted and grew; the sleeping man intuited a series of visual images and, simply, the words that expressed them. After a few hours he awoke, certain that he had composed, or received, a poem of some three hundred lines. He remembered them with particular clarity and was able to transcribe the fragment that is now part of his work. An unexpected visitor interrupted him, and it was later impossible for him to recall the rest. “To his no small surprise and mortification,” Coleridge wrote, “that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!” Swinburne felt that what he had been able to recover was the supreme example of music in the English language, and that the person capable of analyzing it would be able—the metaphor is Keats’—to unravel a rainbow. Translations or summaries of poems whose principal virtue is music are useless and may be harmful; it is best simply to bear in mind, for now, that Coleridge was given a page of undisputed splendor in a dream.

The case, although extraordinary, is not unique. In his psychological study, The *World of Dreams*, Havelock Ellis has compared it with that of the violinist and composer Giuseppe Tartini, who dreamed that the Devil (his slave) was playing a marvelous sonata on the violin; when he awoke, the dreamer deduced, from his imperfect memory, the “*Trillo del Diavolo*.” Another classic example of unconscious cerebration is that of Robert Louis Stevenson, to whom—as he himself described it in his “Chapter on Dreams”—one dream gave the plot of *Olalla* and another, in 1884, the plot of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Tartini, waking, wanted to imitate the music he had heard in a dream; Stevenson received outlines of stories—forms in general—in his. Closer to Coleridge’s verbal inspiration is the one attributed by the Venerable

Bede to Caedmon (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* IV, 24). The case occurred at the end of the seventh century in the missionary and warring England of the Saxon kingdoms. Caedmon was an uneducated shepherd and was no longer young; one night he slipped away from some festivity because he knew that the harp would be passed to him and he didn't know how to sing. He fell asleep in a stable, among the horses, and in a dream someone called him by his name and ordered him to sing. Caedmon replied that he did not know how, but the voice said, "Sing about the origin of created things." Then Caedmon recited verses he had never heard. He did not forget them when he awoke, and was able to repeat them to the monks at the nearby monastery of Hild. Although he couldn't read, the monks explained passages of sacred history to him and he,

> as it were, chewing the cud, converted the same into most harmonious verse; and sweetly repeating the same made his masters in their turn his hearers. He sang the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the history of Genesis: and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the land of promise, with many other histories from holy writ; the incarnation, passion, resurrection of our Lord, and his ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of the apostles; also the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the delights of heaven; besides many more about the Divine benefits and judgments . . .

He was the first sacred poet of the English nation. "None could ever compare with him," Bede wrote, "for he did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God." Years later, he foretold the hour of his death and awaited it in sleep. Let us hope that he met his angel again.

At first glance, Coleridge's dream may seem less astonishing than that of his precursor. "Kubla Khan" is a remarkable composition, and the nine-line hymn dreamed by Caedmon barely displays any virtues beyond its oneiric origin; but Coleridge was already a poet while Caedmon's vocation was revealed to him. There is, however, a later event, which turns the marvel of the dream that engendered "Kubla Khan" into something nearly unfathomable. If it is true, the story of Coleridge's dream began many centuries before Coleridge and has not yet ended.

The poet's dream occurred in 1797 (some say 1798), and he published his account of the dream in 1816 as a gloss or justification of the unfinished poem. Twenty years later, in Paris, the first Western version of one of those

universal histories that are so abundant in Persian literature appeared in fragmentary form: the *Compendium of Histories* by Rashid al-Din, which dates from the fourteenth century. One line reads as follows: “East of Shang-tu, Kublai Khan built a palace according to a plan that he had seen in a dream and retained in his memory.” The one who wrote this was a vizier of Ghazan Mahmud, a descendant of Kublai.

A Mongolian emperor, in the thirteenth century, dreams a palace and builds it according to his vision; in the eighteenth century, an English poet, who could not have known that this construction was derived from a dream, dreams a poem about the palace. Compared with this symmetry of souls of sleeping men who span continents and centuries, the levitations, resurrections, and apparitions in the sacred books seem to me quite little, or nothing at all.

How is it to be explained? Those who automatically reject the supernatural (I try always to belong to this group) will claim that the story of the two dreams is a coincidence, a line drawn by chance, like the shapes of lions or horses that are sometimes formed by clouds. Others will argue that the poet somehow knew that the Emperor had dreamed the palace, and then claimed he had dreamed the poem in order to create a splendid fiction that would palliate or justify the truncated and rhapsodic quality of the verses.[19] This seems reasonable, but it forces us to arbitrarily postulate a text un known to Sinologists in which Coleridge was able to read, before 1816, about Kublai’s dream.[20] More appealing are the hypotheses that transcend reason: for example, that after the palace was destroyed, the soul of the Emperor penetrated Coleridge’s soul in order that the poet could rebuild it in words, which are more lasting than metal and marble.

The first dream added a palace to reality; the second, which occurred five centuries later, a poem (or the beginning of a poem) suggested by the palace; the similarity of the dreams hints of a plan; the enormous length of time involved reveals a superhuman executor. To speculate on the intentions of that immortal or long-lived being would be as foolish as it is fruitless, but it is legitimate to suspect that he has not yet achieved his goal. In 1691, Father Gerbillon of the Society of Jesus confirmed that ruins were all that was left of Kublai Khan’s palace; of the poem, we know that barely fifty lines were salvaged. Such facts raise the possibility that this series of dreams and works has not yet ended. The first dreamer was given the vision of the palace, and he built it; the second, who did not know of the other’s dream, was given the poem about the palace. If this plan does not fail, someone, on a night centuries removed from us, will dream the same dream, and not suspect that others have dreamed it, and he will give it a form of marble or of music. Perhaps this series of dreams has no end, or perhaps the last one will be the key.

After writing this, I glimpsed or thought I glimpsed another explanation. Perhaps an archetype not yet revealed to mankind, an eternal object (to use Whitehead's term), is gradually entering the world; its first manifestation was the palace; its second, the poem. Whoever compares them will see that they are essentially the same.

[1951] *—Translated by Eliot Weinberger*

HOWARD GISKIN

Mystical Phenomenology of the Book in Borges

En este estudio, se propone examinar por primera vez, la concepción mística del libro de Borges. Para Borges, todos los libros son espejos místicos, a través de los cuales los hombres pueden realizar la unidad del universo consigo mismos. La concepción borgeana del conocimiento místico por medio del libro se desarrolla en orden deductivo con los siguientes temas: (1) una crítica de las teorías del conocimiento de Heráclito, Platón, Plotino, Berkeley, y Schopenhauer; (2) una síntesis de estas filosofías y la adopción provisional del idealismo absoluto como método para descubrir su ser verdadero; (3) una búsqueda de la identidad personal por medio del libro; (4) el libro y el lector como microcosmos del universo; (5) la lectura como forma de percepción mística. Resulta que el lector no sólo entiende lo que ya existe en los libros, sino que crea continuamente la realidad a través de su participación en el proceso de la lectura. Para Borges el libro es un instrumento místico en que el hombre puede descubrir su verdadera naturaleza y finalmente su universo entero.

For Borges, reading provides a direct intuition of reality through integration of the reader and the universe contained in the book. Books are mirrors through which we can know ourselves. A mystical fusion occurs in which the reader and the book form one indivisible unity to create meaning.[1] Borges develops his mystical conception of reading through a critique of theories of knowledge of Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, and Schopenhauer. He synthesizes these philosophies, adopting provisionally absolute idealism as a way of discovering the true self. Borges finds books a tool through which he searches for self-identity, viewing book and reader as microcosms of the universe. The reader, for him, is a mystical unifier of the One and the Many. Ultimately, reading is a form of mystical perception. Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, and Schopenhauer are of particular relevance to mysticism in Borges, since he uses the thought of these philosophers as a base for his own conception of knowledge

REVISTA CANADIENSE DE ESTUDIOS HISPÁNICOS Vol. XIV, No. 2 Invierno 1990

and as the theoretical underpinning of his literary mysticism.[2]

From Heraclitus, Borges accepts the position that the objects of sense perception are always in a state of flux, so they cannot be the source of true knowledge. Heraclitus, a pantheist, according to both Plato and Aristotle, held that nothing is stable, that all things change (Copleston Vol. 1, Part 1: 55). Yet, Heraclitus taught a doctrine of unity in diversity. For him, conflict of opposites is necessary for the unity of the One. Reality is One, yet Many also (56). For Borges, this tension of unity in diversity is also evident, and he is deeply affected by Heraclitus' declaration that all things change ("Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw" 158). Yet, what most strongly links Borges to Heraclitus is the Argentine writer's preoccupation with time and personal identity.[3] For Borges as well as Heraclitus, there is an apparent contradiction in the fact that all things are in constant flux and yet are One and unchanging. Borges finds it disturbing that not only the cosmos, but also we the observers change from moment to moment. Such flux seems to preclude any possibility of certainty. However, as Borges points out, there is something very disconcerting about this, since we desire to believe in a non-changing entity, an "I," observer of all events ("El tiempo" 105).

Borges follows Heraclitus in holding that knowledge of the unchanging in individuals comes through direct participation in the cosmic One. For Heraclitus, God or the Rational Principle, remains unchanged, while all else transforms. The wise realize their true nature, aware that they are a reflection of the cosmic unity of the unchanging One and the diverse Many (Copleston 59). For Borges too, we are a microcosm of the unity and diversity of the universe. What we experience as the subjective sensation of self is actually a composite of impressions, memories, desires, and sensations in constant flux. Still, some part of us, perhaps that identified with divinity, and known through epiphany or deep meditation, does not partake of the myriad changes of phenomena.

In addition to Heraclitus' thought, Plato's doctrine of forms greatly interests Borges. His frequent suggestion that all members of a species are one recalls the Platonic concept of the archetype or form ("Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva" 48). For Plato, the object of true knowledge must be stable, changeless. He assumed the existence of universal objects of perception which constitute higher knowledge (νόησις), archetypes (ἀρχαί), or forms (εἶδος). Borges accepts the possibility that sensible objects may have a higher, more universal existence on the archetypal plane. The possibility of an archetypal reality, in which objects are but shadows or copies of a universal Platonic form, runs through his work ("El ruiseñor de Keats" 116).

Platonic archetypes are eternal, immutable, existing apart from the phenomenal world of flux. The concept of the archetype, which is Borges' most important inheritance from Plato, supports his own mysticism. For Plato, higher knowledge is experienced through direct perception of the archetypes by pure reason. Perceptibles are never the objects of such knowing for Plato, and the highest intuition of reality is outside time. According to Borges, Plato views time as "la imagen móvil de la eternidad" ("El tiempo" 95). The eternal is the world of the archetype, and epiphany (as Plato suggests in the *Symposium*) presents the possibility of contacting this eternal archetypal reality. For Borges, an essential problem is: how to experience the infinite unchanging reality *in time*?

Though not as frequently mentioned as Heraclitus and Plato, Plotinus is a key figure in Borges' mysticism. Plotinus represents for Borges the clearest statement by a philosopher of the possibility of an instantaneous intuition of the universe *sub specie aeternitatis* ("Historia de la eternidad" 15). For Plotinus, God is absolutely transcendent, beyond thought and being, ineffable and ultimately incomprehensible (*Enneads* 5.4.1). The One (God) is beyond being, indivisible, unchanging, eternal, and without past or future. For Plotinus, the highest form of knowledge is mystical knowledge of God, which suggests to Borges a way of knowing reality higher than rational inquiry.

Borges' concern with the problems of time and personal identity leads him to study the philosophy of Berkeley, who denied the existence of matter. Objects exist only when perceived; their essence is to be perceived, *esse est percipi*. In "Nueva refutación del tiempo" Borges argues that if Berkeley is correct in asserting that matter does not exist, and Hume in arguing that it is impossible to prove the reality of spirit and absolute space, we have no right to assume the continuity of time. Borges denies the existence of one time in which all facts are linked. Rather, there exists only each moment, the past and future being mere fabrications of the mind. In the fleeting present is the entire history of the universe (176). It is the possibility of perceiving eternity in the present which presents for Borges a mystical way to escape our time-bound existence, and to come into contact with the eternal and non-temporal reality. Time, as it is normally perceived, prevents us from directly experiencing the One.

It is, however, Schopenhauer's metaphysics which most strongly influences Borges' belief in the possibility of directly intuiting non-temporal and non-spatial reality. Schopenhauer stresses transcending the limitations of time and space through contemplation. Because such contemplation is will knowing itself, it is not subject to causality

or any other limitations of the particular (3:149). For Schopenhauer, experience of the noumenal reality, pure will, takes place in the present moment. He denies the reality of the past and the future, asserting only the present to be real (Borges "El tiempo circular" 96). For Schopenhauer, the elimination of the will-to-live by will knowing itself takes the form of a mystical rebirth. The denial of will depends on will's sudden knowledge of itself, proceeding "from the inmost relation of knowing and volition in man and therefore [it] comes suddenly, as if spontaneously from without" (Schopenhauer 4:334–335). Aesthetic contemplation lifts the knower beyond temporal and spatial limitations, who becomes pure will-less subject, contemplating the object presented to him (1:147).

While Borges professed no radically new system of philosophy, he is clearly most sympathetic to idealist metaphysics. He comes closest to accepting a form of idealism which can be described as a synthesis of certain elements of the philosophies of Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, and Schopenhauer, the centre of which is the epiphany. According to Borges, metaphysics can never expect to encompass reality in its totality, and he considers it risky to assume that words can ever much resemble the universe ("Avatares de la tortuga" 136). Nevertheless, he favours Schopenhauer's thought above all others: "Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: el carácter alucinatorio del mundo" (136). The philosophies discussed all posit that the world of everyday experience is somehow not real. All, however, reject relativism in favour of some form of higher cognition in which the sensory world is transcended, and the individual comes into contact with the sphere of the unchanging One. Despite Borges' frequent reminders that reality is ultimately a mystery, epiphany remains the sole possibility of knowing the universe completely, experiencing directly the unity of the One and the Many, as well as discovering true self-identity.

For Borges, the search for identity of self often takes place through the book. He refers to all literature as the work of Spirit. In "El libro," Borges comments that Bernard Shaw, in response to whether the Sacred Spirit had written the Bible, replied: "Todo libro que vale la pena de ser releído ha sido escrito por el Espíritu" (18). Books are not merely inanimate objects of paper and leather, but living carriers of Universal Spirit which animates all things; they are keys to knowledge of self and cosmos. At its highest, knowledge through the book is a mystical communion, in which the reader ceases to exist as mere subject and book as object, and a fusion takes place in which both undergo change. For Borges, a book is a mirror, a bridge to self-discovery, because the reader becomes aware of the workings of

Spirit, though only to the extent that he realizes Spirit's manifestation in himself.

In "La biblioteca de Babel," an allegory of the search for self through the book, Borges views the universe as analogous to an immense and possibly infinite library: "El universo (que otros llaman la Biblioteca) se compone de un número indefinido, y tal vez infinito, de galerías hexagonales, con vastos pozos de ventilación en el medio, cercado por barandas bajísimas" (89). Borges attributes to the library all the characteristics of the universe. Librarians endlessly speculate about the library's nature, suggesting that there may exist a "libro total," which contains the key to the meanings of all other books. The narrator tells us that he has spent the better part of his life in search of this book, a fruitless search which has left him nearly blind and close to death. Similarly, in "El milagro secreto," the condemned Hladík dreams he is in the ancient library at Clementinum, where he meets a librarian who has become blind searching for the letter which contains God (171). The librarians in "La biblioteca de Babel" argue about the true nature of the library, while mystics claim that ecstasy reveals a large circular bed with a great circular book with a continuous back ... and that this cyclical book is God (90).

The library, like the universe, appears chaotic, but the existence of such a book might explain the inner workings of reality. The library contains books on all subjects, treated in infinite detail. The library, like the universe, is composed of a limited number of basic constituents, arranged in infinite combinations. All books are composed of the letters of the alphabet, no two volumes identical. The library (universe) is complete, including all things possible. Borges ponders whether we can ever know the universe if it is infinite, since our experience is limited by our imperfect intellect and the short duration of life. The library is a universe like ours in which there appears to be no real certainty as to the fundamental nature of reality. The librarians, like our scientists, philosophers, and theologians, search for meaning by studying the world around them (in their case, books), but their search never seems to be completed; always some doubt remains as to the truth of their propositions.

The "libro total" is the mystical reflection of all books in the Library of Babel, but the library itself is infinite. Knowledge of the total book means gaining an absolute understanding of the universe and its myriad workings: "De esas premisas incontrovertibles dedujo que la Biblioteca es total y que sus anaqueles registran todas las posibles combinaciones de los veintitantos símbolos ortográficos (número, aunque vastísimo, no infinito) o sea todo lo que es dable expresar: en todos los idiomas ... No había problema personal o

mundial cuya elocuente solución no existiera: en algún hexágono" (94). The quest for the total book represents the ageless search for complete and direct perception of reality: the mystical quest. The mystical nature of the total book is undeniable, since it would allow us to understand reality fully; it would have to be absolute, and its reader would not be subject to the confusion and falsity of ordinary perception. Furthermore, apprehension of the knowledge contained in this book must necessarily be through mystical intuition, since normal perception would merely yield relative, incomplete and imperfect wisdom.

For Borges, the book is potentially a microcosm of the universe; an absolute or total book would be an actualization of this possibility. The absolute book is Borges' most striking metaphor for the mystical interaction of reader and book. It is through an absolute book (such as the Sacred Scriptures) that the reader most effectively acts as unifier of the Many, although all reading implies the unification of diverse elements by the reader. The book and reader are microcosms, opposing mirrors which endlessly reflect the other's true (and sometimes hidden) nature, revealing a reality which is infinite and yet contained in each.

In "Una vindicación de la Cábala," Borges notes that the Cabalists believed the Old Testament to have been dictated by an infinite intelligence, whose production would naturally be complete and infallible (58): "Imaginemos ... de acuerdo con la teoría pre-agustiniana de inspiración verbal, que Dios dicta, palabra por palabra lo que se propone decir. Esa premisa (que fue la que asumieron los cabalistas) hace de la Escritura un texto absoluto, donde la colaboración del azar es calculable en cero ... un libro impenetrable a la contingencia, un mecanismo de infinitos propósitos, de variaciones infalibles, de revelaciones que acechan ..." (59–60). For Borges, a book is not merely an inanimate object, but somehow a magical and mystical key to knowledge. In "Magias parciales del *Quijote*" he comments: "en 1833, Carlyle observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben" (55). The absolute book is all books which have ever been written, including those which shall be written, as well as books that are possible, but may never exist; it is a microcosm (and reflection) of the entire universe, since it contains (at least potentially) discussions of everything known, unknown, or possible. Reading such a book amounts to a mystical communion with the Infinite.

Significantly, in "La busca de Averroes," the cause of the Moorish philosopher's perplexity is a book, Aristotle's *Poetics*: "A las dificultades

intrínsecas debemos añadir que Averroes, ignorante del siriaco y del griego, trabajaba sobre la traducción de una traducción. La víspera, dos palabras lo habían detenido en el principio de la *Poética*. Esas palabras eran *tragedia* y *comedia*" (92). Averroes lacks the knowledge to understand these terms, and in fact has never encountered a theatre in the world of Islam. His position is analogous to ours. We try to comprehend the essential meanings of things, while missing vital information which we can never know. The result is always the same: mistaken beliefs about the way things really are. Averroes, who is no exception, attributes meanings to "tragedy" and "comedy" which have nothing to do with Aristotle's intention. Ironically, Borges writes that the meanings of the unknown words are revealed to Averroes; unfortunately he (Averroes) was mistaken: "Sentí que Averroes, queriendo imaginar lo que es un drama sin haber sospechado lo que es un teatro, no es más absurdo que yo, queriendo imaginar a Averroes, sin otro material que unos adarmes de Renán, de Lane y de Asín Palacios" (101). Perhaps more insidious than the missing information and imperfect texts is the fact that Averroes' mind is limited by the world he lives in. The difficulty lies not so much in his lacking the necessary information to solve the problem, as in believing that all the relevant facts are available. Ultimately, the most fascinating and ironic aspect of "La busca de Averroes," is Averroes' ignorance of his ignorance, which, according to Socrates in the *Apology* (23a), is our most grievous fault. Averroes would have erred less had he suspended judgment and accepted his ignorance.

For Borges, cultured reading demands acquired ignorance, in which the reader does not prejudge the text, and is continually open to various interpretations, some of which may conflict with others. Reading is a Socratic dialogue, in which the reader (as perceiving, thinking microcosm) communes with the book (which is also a microcosm of the entire universe). The result is a mystical fusion of the reader (subject) and the book (object), which gives rise to a new and deeper truth inexpressible in dualistic terms. This truth is neither simply the contents of the book nor a person's thoughts, but transcends both. Mystical reading reveals the impossibility of making absolute statements about anything. It is a form of unlearning, in which the reader discards prejudices, preconceptions, and confusions which impede the direct perception of reality. In "La poesía," Borges asserts that books are not static and unchanging, but essentially different for each reader: "El panteísta irlandés Escoto Erígena dijo que la Sagrada Escritura encierra un número infinito de sentidos y la comparó con el plumaje tornasolado del pavo real. Siglos después un cabalista español dijo que Dios hizo la Escritura para cada uno de los

hombres de Israel y por consiguiente hay tantas Biblias como lectores de la Biblia ... me atrevo a decir que son exactas, no sólo en lo referente a la Escritura sino en lo referente a cualquier libro digno de ser releído" (101).

Books are mirrors because they reflect only what is presented to them. Even the Bible is of no use to someone totally ignorant or mentally impaired. For Borges, books are mystical carriers of Spirit, which come to life when read, transmitting the living essence of their authors. But as Spirit is never static, the book also undergoes constant transformation in the hands of the reader: "Cambiamos incesantemente y es dable afirmar que cada relectura, cada recuerdo de esa relectura, renueva el texto. También el texto es el cambiante río de Heráclito" (102). The act of reading recreates reality through the dynamic interplay of reader and book. There is no longer the illusion of separate thinking subject and inanimate book but rather a flowing progression of ideas and perceptions. Borges' approach to reading can better be understood in the light of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Heisenberg discovered that beyond certain limits we cannot measure nature accurately. These limits are due not to the inefficiency of our measuring devices, but rather to the way nature presents itself to us (Zukav 133). As long as phenomena are experienced by the conscious subject, there arises an ambiguity barrier beyond which lies an area of uncertainty. The Uncertainty Principle states that any effort to measure or interpret a phenomenon results in the altering of the phenomenon. Similarly, according to Borges, interpretation of a text necessarily alters that text. The reading of a text (and any reading involves interpretation) cannot be separated from the nature of the text itself. In Borges' view, a text is not merely what is written, but an entity which literally comes into existence when it is read. But since every reading (or rereading) of a text implies a different consciousness on the part of the reader, the text itself, by Borges' admission, also changes. Reading *Hamlet* today yields a different *Hamlet* from my reading of last year; indeed a reading tomorrow will produce another.[4]

In "Kafka y sus precursores," Borges points out that a writer changes the past by the fact that his precursors may be looked at in a different light according to what he has written: "El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro" (109). This implies that rereading a text recreates history and literature, since our conceptions of the past are created by access to surviving texts and memory, both subject to error and change. Similarly, how we interpret events or texts in the future depends in great part on what we believe now.

According to Borges, Hawthorne's "Wakefield" has a decidedly Kafkian flavour. This would have been impossible had not Kafka lived a century later: "*Wakefield* prefigura a Franz Kafka, pero éste modifica y afina la lectura de *Wakefield*" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 66). Consequently, the reader is as much the creator of literature as the writer, since through the former's interpretation the work is brought to life.

"Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" is Borges' most explicit statement of this new attitude towards reading. Menard, a minor French writer of the twentieth century, wishes to write not merely another *Quijote*, which Borges claims would be easy, but *the Quijote*. Menard's aim is to recreate, word for word, the famous work of Cervantes, without copying it. Borges comments that the work of Menard would nevertheless be an entirely different book. Some see in Menard's *Quijote* a subordination of the author to the psychology of the hero, others merely a transcription of the *Quijote*; yet another has detected the influence of Nietzsche: "El texto de Cervantes y de Menard son verbalmente idénticos, pero el segundo es infinitamente más rico" (56). "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*," is above all a critique of theories of knowledge and, in particular, knowledge derived from books. Borges' critique of knowledge implies that there is no objective text or objective meaning, but that meaning literally comes into being with the interaction of reader and book. Reading is thus primarily an act in which the universe of meaning is brought into being by the participation of the readers. Borges argues against the concept that readers find in a book only what is somehow objectively in it. Books are infinitely rich and protean, capable of assuming a multitude of meanings, depending on the creativity of the reader.

For Borges, the reader is a mystical unifier of the Many, because he is a true creator of reality, not merely an interpreter of an already existing objective truth. The reader's experience of the dissolution of the diverse Many of literature and philosophy into the One of Unity consists of an intuition of the fundamental emptiness[5] of all phenomena, both mental as well as physical. Yet Borges' position is not nihilist, and in fact amounts to exactly the opposite, a sense of the utterly indescribably fullness of reality, which can never be adequately comprehended through language: "No hay ejercicio intelectual que no sea finalmente inútil. Una doctrina es al principio una descripción verosímil del universo; giran los años y es un mero capítulo – cuando no un párrafo o un nombre – de la historia de la filosofía" (58). The mystical unification which can occur through reading is precisely an intuition of the ultimate futility of all interpretations, a realization that the universe infinitely overflows our capacity to explain it. *Hamlet* and

Don Quijote will continue to be reinterpreted and infused with new meaning; perhaps great literature acts as a highly polished mirror in which we can see our protean and infinite nature. Both reader and text are the changing river of Heraclitus.

While Borges does not adopt any mode of thought in a systematic manner, it is evident that he has been influenced by the five philosophers discussed: from Heraclitus Borges inherits the concept of a reality which is ever-changing; Plato's metaphysics leads him to the possibility of a transcendental world of archetypes which is accessible only through a purified form of knowing, possibly mystical ecstasy; Plotinus presents for him the clearest statement of the transcendental mystical unity of all things in the universe; Berkeley suggests the primacy of mind over matter, and Schopenhauer the idea that will (mind) can come to know itself through a mystical, aesthetic experience.

A central conception which runs through these philosophies, and which Borges accepts, is the unreliability of sense perception, and the existence of an unchanging, absolute, and spiritual reality behind the constant flux of the phenomenal world. Schopenhauer's aesthetics provides Borges with the idealist framework for a mystical knowledge of self, which he then applies in his conception of the interaction of reader and book. Borges finds the book a mirror by which we can know ourselves through a mystical fusion, in which neither reader nor book exist apart from the other. Both are manifestations of Universal Spirit, microcosms of all existence. The total book and total library are metaphors for the universe at large, where we wander in search of meaning. An encounter with the total book (and in fact any book) presents the possibility of a mystical experience in which the mysteries of the universe are revealed. Ultimately, all reading is, for Borges, a form of mystical creation/intuition in which the reader as subject fuses with the book (object) to create meaning. Neither book nor reader remains static, and the result is a continual flux in which new meaning is created at each moment.

This implies that we should reject the belief that books are objective repositories of knowledge. The critical effort shifts from excavating what is already assumed to be in the text, to the reading of all texts as if they are infinite, for in fact they are. There is no limit to the reinterpretations which a text may undergo, and none is truer than any other in anything but a relative sense. A thorough examination of what different ages have thought about a work will suffice to prove the limitless possibilities of interpretation. No doubt there will always exist preferred interpretations, but these are in no way absolute, as they depend upon the prevailing views of the time

and period. Since meaning is continually created anew by reinterpretation of texts, our conception of the past and future is also altered. The most significant result of the mystical interaction of reader and book is the knowledge that all constructions of the intellect are ultimately empty, having no absolute or truly objective status.

Borges' reexamination of reading in the light of mysticism results in a reconstruction of our conceptions about the role of reading in the formation of knowledge and the nature of the book itself.[6] No longer can books be held to be static repositories of knowledge but, rather, dynamic, changing entities, whose role in the creation of meaning is that of a mirror, reflecting what the reader offers, and at best his true and hidden nature.

Appalachian State University

NOTES

1 Mysticism, for Borges, is a way to directly intuit the unity of the One and the Many. Through mystical experience an individual perceives the first principles of reality with great lucidity. He sees the unity of the universe and his own integration with it.

2 Borges is a mystical thinker, who has acknowledged that he had several mystical experiences in his life. Quoting from "Sentirse en muerte," published in 1928 and concerning an experience during a stroll in Buenos Aires, he writes in "Nueva refutación del tiempo": "Me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo; indefinido temor imbuido de ciencia que es la mejor claridad de la metafísica" (180). In an interview with Willis Barnstone and Jorge Oclander, Borges once commented that he had had two mystical experiences, but could not tell them: "what happened is not to be put into words ... I had the feeling of living not in but outside of time" (*Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, 11).

3 "No sé si al cabo de veinte o treinta siglos de meditación hemos avanzado mucho en el problema del tiempo. Yo diría que siempre sentimos esa antigua perplejidad, ésa que sintió mortalmente Heráclito en aquel ejemplo al que vuelvo siempre: nadie baja dos veces al mismo río" ("El tiempo" 93–94).

4 In fact, according to Borges' conception of reading, it is hardly possibly to talk about any one book being identical to itself, since the very act of reading implies a continual flux of meanings as one reads. Even the seemingly inviolate unity of the work itself is called into question, since each sentence, phrase, or word changes every time it is read. In short, there does not really exist any truly definable work in the first place.

5 The *emptiness* which is characteristic of Borges is most similar to the concept of *shunyata* in Buddhist thought, an undifferentiated mode of being in which everything is in a state of potentiality or possibility (cf. Nishitani).

6 Borges would undoubtedly agree with Derrida that there is no immutable connection between signifier and signified in language. Signs, they both agree, cannot incorporate any absolute univocal meaning. Borges suggests that every book contains all other books, as illustrated by the concept of the total book.

For Derrida (278–93), knowledge is composed of an interrelated web of signifiers set down in texts as if they composed One Text, an immense totality called "intertextuality" (Merrell 2). While Derrida assumes that we are trapped within this "totality" due to our human limitations, Borges suggests a way out: mystical transcendence of language into the realm of pure being. It is precisely the realization that language bears no necessary or absolute relation to reality which catalyzes, for him, the transition to transrational (mystical) states of cognition. Ironically, although Derrida asserts that his position exposes traditional metaphysics' most insidious assumption, that meaning is embodied in an immutable connection between signifier and signified to form a unified whole, he accepts the occidental materialist bias, denying the existence of a spiritual reality which is directly accessible to consciousness. For Borges, language is a prison only to the extent that we demand from it what it cannot deliver, absolute statements about the nature of reality.

WORKS CITED

BORGES, JORGE LUIS. "Avatares de la tortuga." *Discusión*. Buenos Aires, 1961.

——. "La biblioteca de Babel." *Ficciones*. Madrid, 1972.

——. *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*. Bloomington, 1982.

——. "La busca de Averroes." *El aleph*. Buenos Aires, 1961.

——. "Historia de la eternidad." *Historia de la eternidad*. Buenos Aires, 1961.

——. "Historia del guerrero y de la cautiva." *El aleph*. Buenos Aires, 1961.

——. "Kafka y sus precursores." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "El libro." *Borges oral*. Buenos Aires, 1979.

——. "Magias parciales del Quijote." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "El milagro secreto." *Ficciones*. Madrid, 1972.

——. "Nathaniel Hawthorne." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "Nota sobre (hacia) Bernard Shaw." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "Nueva refutación del tiempo." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote." *Ficciones*. Madrid, 1972.

——. "La poesía." *Siete noches*. México, 1980.

——. "El ruiseñor de Keats." *Otras inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "El tiempo." *Borges oral*. Buenos Aires, 1979.

——. "El tiempo circular." *Historia de la eternidad*. Buenos Aires, 1960.

——. "Una vindicación de la Cábala." *Discusión*. Buenos Aires, 1961.

COPLESTON, FREDERICK. *A History of Philosophy*. 9 vols. Westminster, Maryland, 1960.

DERRIDA, JACQUES. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. A. Bass. Chicago, 1978.
MERRELL, FLOYD. *Deconstruction Reframed*. West Lafayette, Indiana, 1985.
NISHTITANI, KEIJI. *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. Jan van Bragt. Berkeley, 1982.
PLATO. *The Collected Dialogs of Plato*. Eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton, 1978.
PLOTINUS. *The Six Enneads*. Trans. Stephen Mackenna and B.S. Page. Chicago, 1952.
SCHOPENHAUER, ARTHUR. *The World as Will and Idea*. Trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp. New York, 1977.
ZUKAV, GARY. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. New York, 1979.